

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Division of Environmental Law Enforcement
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MARINE THEFT BUREAU
BOAT THEFT PREVENTION GUIDE

As the number of boats continues to increase on our waters, the number of boat thieves rises as well. Marine theft usually involves relatively unskilled amateurs who strike when they find any easy opportunity. Keep in mind three factors that discourage thieves everywhere – **time, noise, and visibility**. In considering the security of your boat, try to think like a criminal. What factors about your boat would make it an easy target for a thief? We can defend ourselves against boat theft by becoming security conscious and by practicing the following crime prevention measures.

CRIME PREVENTION MEASURES

1. Always remove the key from the ignition when you are not using the boat. When parking a trailered boat, attach a trailer hitch lock; if it's to be parked for a long time, remove a wheel. Fasten the boat itself to a fixed object, using a steel cable or chain with a heavy-duty lock. Don't leave valuable items in an unattended boat.
2. If you store your boat at home, keep it either in a locked garage or in a fenced-in, locked back yard. If you keep it on a river or lake touching your back yard and you're away from home often, lock removable parts (such as a battery) in your house and ask a neighbor to check on the boat often.
3. If you live in an apartment building or condominium, don't leave your boat in the parking lot without some kind of an antitheft device on it. The lot should have good lighting at night. Never leave your boat out with a "FOR SALE" sign on it; other tenants may see the thief at work but assume he's just bought it.
4. If you want to keep the boat in water at a marina, choose a reputable one with full-time security and good lighting.
5. Install an alarm (preferably a combination burglar/fire alarm) wired to the ignition. Have a second, hidden switch in case the thief jumps the first one.

BE PREPARED

1. Record all serial and identification numbers and keep them at home. Hide a second set of numbers somewhere on the boat so you can prove ownership if the thief removes the original set.
2. Don't leave registration and title papers on the boat.
3. Photograph or videotape the interior and exterior of your boat, showing all installed equipment and additional gear. Add identifying notes to the photos-date, sign, and secure them.
4. Protect yourself financially with a boat owner's insurance policy.
5. Be careful when buying a used boat - it could be stolen. Verify all ID numbers to make sure they haven't been tampered with.

AVOID CABIN ENTRY

1. Replace spring-latch locking assembly with deadbolt-type lock.
2. Install lugs in the hinge-plates to prevent opening the door by removing hinge pins.
3. Close or cover any gaps that could allow prying.
4. Lay wooden dowels in the tracks of sliding windows.
5. Add a lexan backup piece and solid brass hasp to make the forward hatch more difficult to open from the outside.
6. Install a commercial or homemade alarm system to ward off intruders. Magnetic or pressure switches on doors, windows, hatches, holds, and instrument mountings, plus pressure mats at entrance points and in front of operating console can activate the alarm. A hidden ignition kill switch can double as an alarm-disarming switch.

LOOSE GEAR

1. Avoid leaving loose gear visible in open boats or on the decks of enclosed boats.
2. Keep radios, TV sets, and other items of value out of sight through windows.
3. Pick one hold or locker and secure it. Beef up the door or cover and install a deadbolt lock or a strong hasp and padlock. Keep your valuables in it when you're not on board.

IDENTIFICATION

1. Make a complete inventory with full descriptions of your boat, trailer, and marine equipment including manufacturer's model and serial numbers. This information will prove invaluable in the event of any type of loss for accurate reporting to law enforcement authorities and insurance companies.

2. Inscribe electronic instruments, communication gear, and other valuables with your driver's license number and state. This allows instant identification of your belongings by law enforcement computer networks. Prominently display the Operation Identification sticker so the thief will know you're serious about crime prevention
3. Mark deck chairs, flotation gear, windbreakers and other loose items with the name of your boat, homeport, and your name. This will make them less desirable to a thief and much easier to recover.

WHEN BUYING A BOAT

Be certain that the boat's description on the title matches the boat you are buying. Check year, make, length, and hull identification number.

Do not buy a boat if the hull identification number has been altered or removed. Do not buy a boat that is registered as "homemade" but is obviously a manufactured model. Do not buy an outboard motor if the model and serial number plates have been removed. Be suspicious of a fresh paint job on a late model boat. If the price seems too good to be true, there is a good chance that it's stolen.

Don't get stuck purchasing a bargain with a dubious pedigree. Before buying any boat, be certain the seller can provide you with his current registration, a bill of sale and title. Compare the registration information against the actual boat; if the hull I.D. and description don't match, leave it. Failure on your part to obtain all necessary paperwork will likely result in your not being able to register the purchase. If you suspect the attempted sale of a stolen boat, immediately contact the environmental police and state or local police.

REPORTING MARINE THEFT

If your boat, trailer, or gear has possibly been stolen, you should immediately report it to your local law enforcement agency, the state environmental police, and your insurance company. Upon reporting such theft to the environmental police, your boat will be deleted from the registration database, preventing re-registration by another party. Use your written and photographic marine record to give specific and complete property information. The Marine Theft Bureau, a specialized unit in the environmental police, investigates marine theft cases in cooperation with other police agencies. They can also be of assistance to boat owners with other issues involving titling, registration, abandoned boats, and fraud.

WATERFRONT CRIME WATCH

Waterfront crime watch is a statewide program, sponsored by the Massachusetts Neighborhood Crime Watch Commission, designed to educate and encourage citizens to recognize and report suspicious or criminal activity on and around the water. The program promotes the use of crime prevention practices by boaters, fisherman, and waterfront residents.

The basic goals of this initiative are to prevent larceny and vandalism to boats and personal property, to recognize suspicious situations, and to report unsafe boat operation, fishing violations, or dumping of hazardous waste. Any person interested in more information on this program can call 1-888-80-WATCH, the state Marine Theft Bureau at (617) 626-1666 or contact their local police department's crime prevention officer.